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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM : AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA — 1002 DLSP. NO.

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON. — May 13, 1953 DATE

REF : Despatch No. 917, April 16, 1953, and previous.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF INTER-AMERICAN AFFAIRS
MAY 15 1953

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SUBJECT: Alleged Confessions of Salamá Insurgents Implicate Foreign Elements.

The manner in which the Guatemalan authorities conducted the preliminary hearings (sumario) of those accused of complicity in the Salamá revolt of March 29, 1953 pointed to an intention to stress alleged foreign intervention, thus ostensibly providing backing for the charges made by the Foreign Minister, Dr. Luis CASTEDA in his note of April 1, 1953 to the Secretary General of the United Nations regarding a threatened violation of Guatemala's sovereignty and his further note of April 4 to the other Central American countries withdrawing from the Organization of Central American States (ODECA). The Government's charges that the United Fruit Company, the other Central American countries and the Dominican Republic had backed the uprising were based almost entirely on confessions which the accused later repudiated, claiming that they had been forced to sign, and the independent press adopted the position that the authorities were attempting to enlarge a bandit raid into an international conspiracy. The Ambassadors of the Central American countries in Guatemala said that neither they nor their Governments had assisted the rebels, and on May 12 the United Fruit Company added its denial to those of the others.

The preliminary judicial investigation, roughly analogous to our procedure of indictment, is conducted in secret under the Guatemalan rules of procedure, but after the court had indicted the alleged ringleaders it permitted representatives of the press to inspect the statements made by the prisoners and entered as evidence. According to newspaper accounts, the statements filled over 1,000 pages (one paper said 2,000) and consisted principally of "confessions" signed by the various prisoners purporting to tell what they know of the planning and execution of the uprising.

The prisoners at Salamá fall into two groups: actual participants in the uprising and those accused of being the "intellectual authors" of the revolt. The former, who numbered 160 according to the official Diario de Centro América of

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April 29, were mostly humble folk who said they had been awakened in the early hours of March 29 by the ringing of church bells, had run into the street and had been given the option of joining the revolt or going to jail. All said they had been handed a rifle but denied having used it. When the Government forces approached Salamá, they took to the hills. Most denied knowing any leaders of the movement other than those actually in Salamá: Major Manuel de Jesús JUAREZ, Sr. Otilio FIGUEROA and Sr. Julio Sergio ESCOBAR. However, the convicts from the local jail whom Major Juárez had enlisted in his revolt said, in what El Imparcial described as virtually identical statements, that Major Juárez had told them that the Government had fallen, that either Sr. Juan CORDOVA Cerna or Sr. Luis VALLADARES Lycinena (Guatemala City anti-Communist leaders) was the provisional President, that the military chiefs of the movement were Colonels Guillermo FLORES Avendaño and Herlindo SOLORZANO, and that a large number of other prominent anti-Communists were involved. El Imparcial commented, "One cannot but admire the confidence which the famous guerilla of Salamá [Juárez] displayed from the very first in his presumed sympathizers, the convicts, so that he shouted to them all his state secrets, and one must also admire their magnificent memories, to remember so many names."

Conspicuously absent from the trial were the actual field leaders of the uprising. Sres. Otilio Figueroa, Jorge HAUESSLER Ariza, Fabián URIZAR and Eduardo MORALES y Morales were shot "while attempting to escape" from the Salamá prison on the night of March 31 (despatch No. 905, April 15, 1953). Major Juárez, Julio Sergio Escobar and Sr. Florencio Abigail MEJIA found asylum in the Mexican Embassy and left Guatemala on April 9 for Mexico, where they were reported by El Imparcial (April 20) as stating that only fourteen men were involved in the original assault on the police barracks in Salamá, that they had painted circles on the nearby airstrip to facilitate the landing of airplanes which failed to arrive, and that they had no connection whatsoever with any foreign government. According to this version, they also denied that such figures as Sr. Juan Córdova Cerna, Sr. Mario SANDOVAL Alarcón, the student anti-Communist leader, or retired Colonels Alfredo CASTAÑEDA and Herlindo Solorzano were involved in plotting the uprising. But they did not say whence the airplanes they had expected were to come; the fact that the insurgents fired on a Guatemalan Air Force plane which flew low over the airstrip would seem to foreclose the possibility that they had hoped for support from that quarter.

The prisoners on whom attention principally centered were those charged with being the behind-the-scene planners of the uprising. Prominent among them were the anti-Communist student leaders Sres. Mario Sandoval Alarcón and Oscar COBAR Castillo,

whose statements (subsequently repudiated as having been extorted by coercion) seemingly indicated that the plot had been backed financially by the United Fruit Company and by several foreign governments. Sr. Sandoval in his "confession" stated that he and Sr. Carlos SIMONS (an anti-Communist editor now in exile) had used $64,000 supplied by the Fruit Company to purchase arms in Guatemala and abroad; that the arms had been hidden at Simons' house and at the houses of Sr. Jorge Haussler and retired Colonel Herlindo Solórzano; and that the movement failed because of orders not to move sent at the last minute to regional leaders (all named) in Nazatenango, El Progreso, Tiquisate and Jutiapa. Sr. Sandoval also allegedly said that the Ambassador in Guatemala of El Salvador, Colonel José Alberto FUNES, had "guaranteed absolute protection" and had supplied Sr. Simons with 30 machine guns.

The testimony of Sr. Cóbar, which he also refused to confirm at the preliminary hearing, was particularly extensive on the question of foreign aid. He reportedly said that he had heard a conversation in which Sr. Simons had proposed to Sres. Domingo SIGUENZA, Cosme VIGGOVICH, Mario Sandoval and Gabriel MARTINEZ del Rosal (all student anti-Communist leaders) that they take part in a plot to overthrow the Government, and that Sr. Simons had said the plot was backed by $64,000 given by the United Fruit Company and would receive military assistance from El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. Sr. Cóbar's statement went on to say that the Salvadoran Ambassador, Colonel Funes, had supplied 60 machine guns and that arms had been brought into Guatemala by the Ambassadors of El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, "taking advantage of their diplomatic prerogatives". He allegedly said the civilian leaders of the movement were the students named above together with Sr. Juan Córdova Cerna and that the military leaders were retired Colonels Herlindo Solórzano, Guillermo Flores Avendaño and Alfredo Castañeda.

The statements of the Colonels added little to the Government's case: Colonel Castañeda at first admitted and later denied that he had planned the attack on Salamá and received money from Sr. Simons, Sr. Córdova Cerna and others. Colonel Solórzano, who was described by El Imparcial as nearly 70 years of age, almost blind and suffering from a heart ailment, stoutly refused to admit anything: when asked if he had not planned the March 29 uprising, he replied, "Not even a sergeant would have made a plan so foolish." Colonel Flores, who is said to have aided in the downfall of the UBICO dictatorship in 1944, stated that he would never have picked Salamá as a place to begin a revolution since it lacked communications, transportation and commerce.

No clear picture emerges from the fragments of the prisoners' testimony published in the press, and it must be borne in

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mind that all the "confessions" were subsequently disavowed. Further, in notes sent directly by the Foreign Ministers of El Salvador, Costa Rica and Nicaragua to the Guatemalan Foreign Minister those Governments said they had not intervened in Guatemala's internal affairs and their Ambassadors here individually told the local press they had not been involved. On May 12 El Imparcial published an INS story datelined Boston which quoted Mr. Almyr Lake Bump, United Fruit Company Manager in Guatemala as stating that the charges against the Company of furnishing funds for the Salamá attempt were totally false and that it was the Company's policy to respect the duly-constituted authorities of the countries where it operated.

Although the pro-Government press accepted the alleged confessions at their face value and cited them as evidence of threatened if not actual foreign intervention and of the traitorous character of the anti-Communist movement, the general impression was that the Government's case against the planners (as distinct from the executors) of the Salamá uprising was not convincing, especially as regards the participation of foreign entities. Further processing of the cases against the accused may be considerably delayed since court officials have stated that two to three months will be required to make the copies of the voluminous evidence needed for the formal trial. Meanwhile, the Government's interests have been furthered in several respects: the testimony presented in the Salamá court provides ostensible justification for Guatemala's appeal to the United Nations and its withdrawal from ODECA; the "confessions" supply pro-Government propagandists with weapons to make the opposition appear unpatriotic and give the Government a reason for holding in prison several opposition leaders; and finally the statements provide an additional item for the Government's eventual case against its principal bête noire, the United Fruit Company.

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